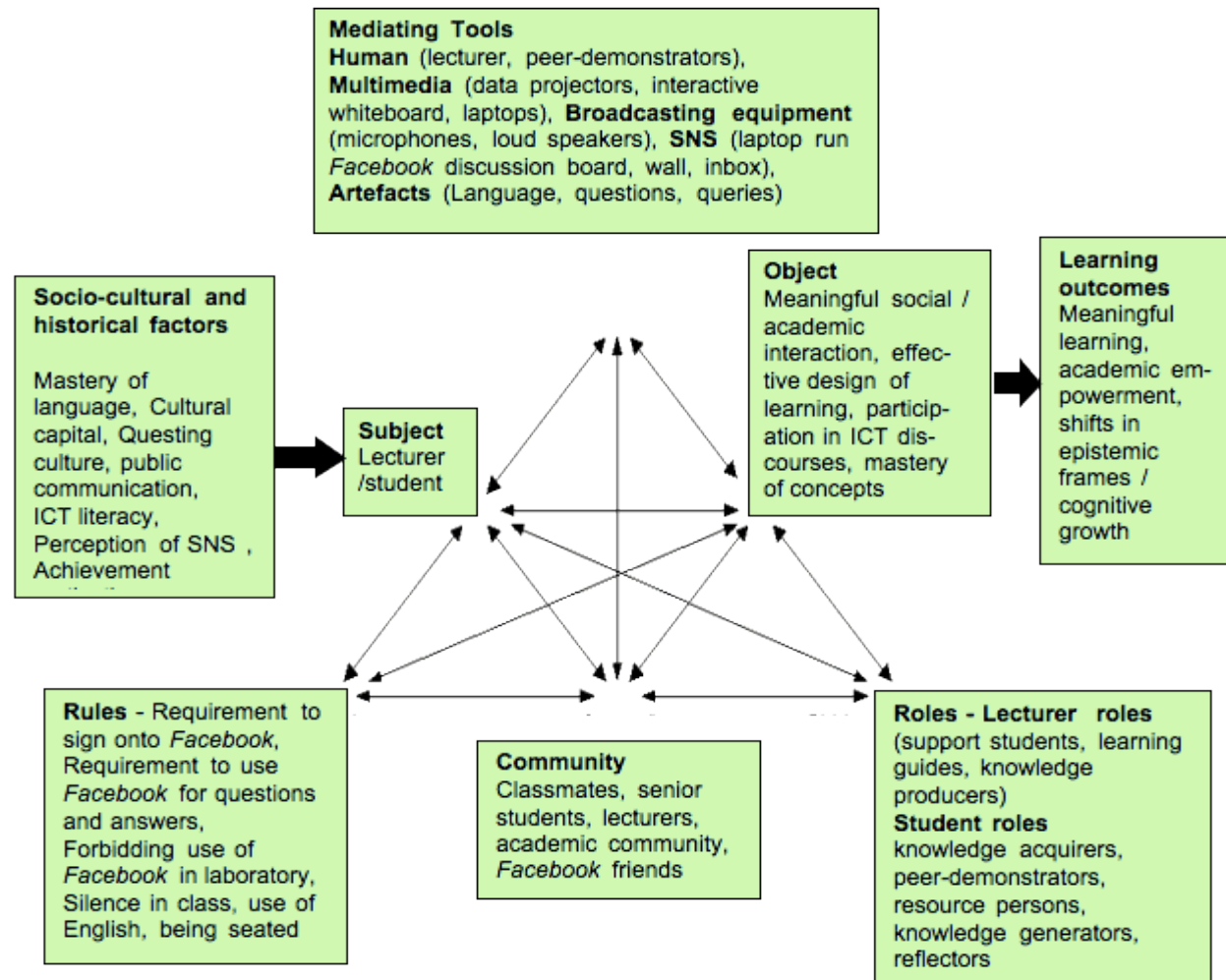


## Image



<http://www.ascilite.org.au/ajet/ajet28/rambe-2.html>

### Historical background and development

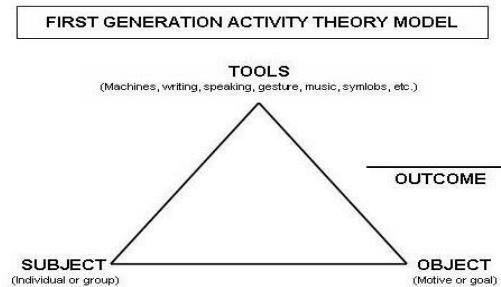
This is an approach to understanding human behaviour by examining the social context of the behaviour and the motivations of social pressures on people as they engage in activities. It explores the complex relationship between humans and their tools, seeing tools as manifestations of internal processes that facilitate interpersonal communication. It is a circular theory: social interactions provoke the creation of new tools that facilitate deeper or more complex and productive social interactions.

This theory proposes that consciousness is shaped by practice, that people and artifacts mediate our relationship with reality. Consciousness is produced in the enactment of activity with other people and things, rather than being something confined inside a human head. The activity theory is based on external motivations. Rather than looking at topics like the reward mechanisms within the brain, for example, it is interested in the social setting of activities and interactions. As people interact with their environment and each other, they achieve a series of outcomes leading to the development of tools. These could be literal tools, as in the case of someone who spends time constructing a computer, or more metaphorical ones, like social skills. Sometimes, an individual outcome only makes sense within the context of a shared and collective activity. As people engage in activities, they are influenced by the roles they play and are assigned by society, and the rules dictated for people in those roles (<http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-an-activity-theory.htm>)

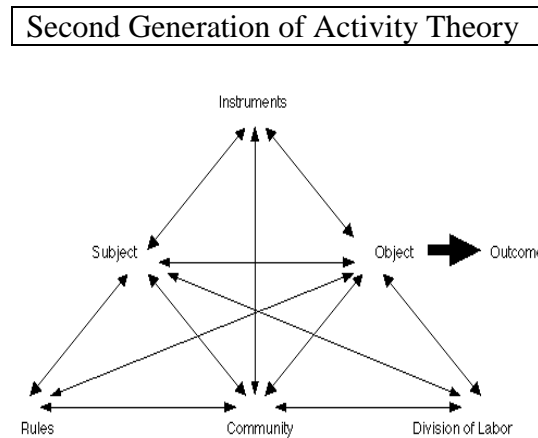
According to <https://sites.google.com/site/socialapproacheslearning/activity-theory---summary>, there are five main points to activity theory, which are:

1. The activities are controlled and mediated through the use and manipulation of artifacts, tools and objects.
2. The activity system consists of a community of ideas, rules and traditions where dividing the labour creates different positions and all persons involved bring with them their own conventions, rules, traditions and objects.
3. The activity systems transform and change over time which allows for new and novel problems to be understood, as well as new potentials for those involved.
4. The activity system will change due to contradictions since the evolution of new tools, different rules or new traditions can/will contradict a specific role in the community.
5. The activity system may undergo expansive transformation or learning where the established system is dramatically changed and recreated under new pressures.

The activity theory has its origins in the Soviet Union and has gone through three generations of history and development. The first generation is that of Vygotsky who challenged the objective nature of behaviourism and the subject nature of psychoanalysis. He attempted to create a framework that would connect the human mind to human activity. Vygotsky looked at an activity as being composed of a subject and an object which were both mediated by a tool. In this case the subject would be a person or a group that is engaged in an activity, and an object, or objective, is what is held by the subject and motivates the activity. Mediation could occur through the use of many different types of materials and/or mental tools (artifacts) including culture, ways of thinking and language.



Critics of the first generation of Activity theory said that mediation by other human beings and social relations was not taken into account in this triangular model. To integrate these ideas into the theory there needed to be a distinction made between collective activity and individual action. The second generation is that of Leont'ev after the death of Vygotsky, who reconstructed the initial theory by the addition of rules, community and idea of the division of labour. Leont'ev became interested in the fact that humans engage in actions that may not themselves satisfy a need, but that contribute to an eventual satisfaction of a need. This second generation of Activity theory was then renamed the activity system. An activity system is a way of visualizing the total configuration of an activity as follows:

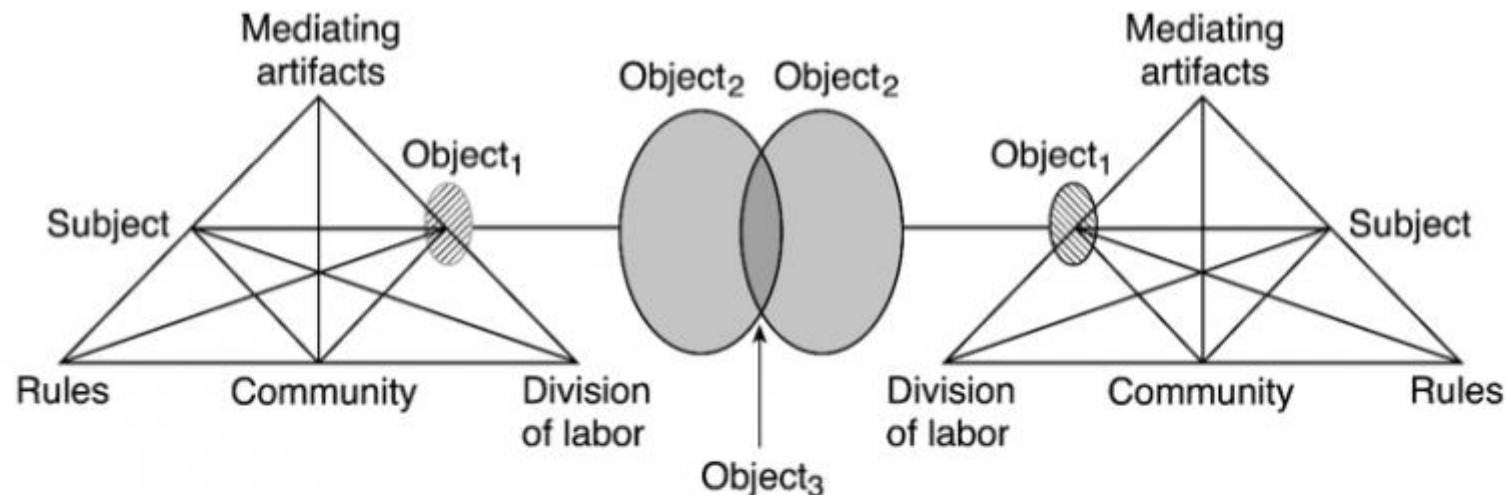


In this model of an activity system, the subject refers to the individual or group whose point of view is taken in the analysis of the activity. The object (or objective) is the target of the activity. Instruments refer to internal or external mediating artifacts which help to achieve the outcomes of the activity. The community consists of one or more people who share the objective with the subject. Rules regulate actions and interactions

within the activity system. The division of labour discusses how tasks are divided horizontally between community members as well as referring to any vertical division of power and status.

The third generation consists of the inputs of Yrjo Engestrom, Bonnie Nardi and Kari Kuutti who felt that two activity systems interact with each other. Yrjo Engestrom developed the activity theory even further through the idea of expansive learning. In it he sees joint activity or practice as the unit of analysis for activity theory instead of individual activity. Bonnie Nardi is interested in the area of computer supported cooperative work. She looks at user interface design; computer mediated communication and studies the theoretical approaches to technology design and evaluation. Kuutti's major research interest is in theoretical understanding of the role of digital artifacts in various human activities, and development of appropriate design methods for them. Engestrom, Nardi and Kuutti all are interested in the fact that we must understand that new processes, models, and practices are essential in this day and age to teach pertinent information in a way that matters to students. New technologies, inventions and innovations are being created every day and we must teach our students the skills, as well as value their creativity, if we want them to be successful in the future where the ways that we live and work are changing every minute.

<https://sites.google.com/site/socialapproacheslearning/activity-theory---summary>



**FIG. 3. Two interacting activity systems as minimal model for the third generation of activity theory.**